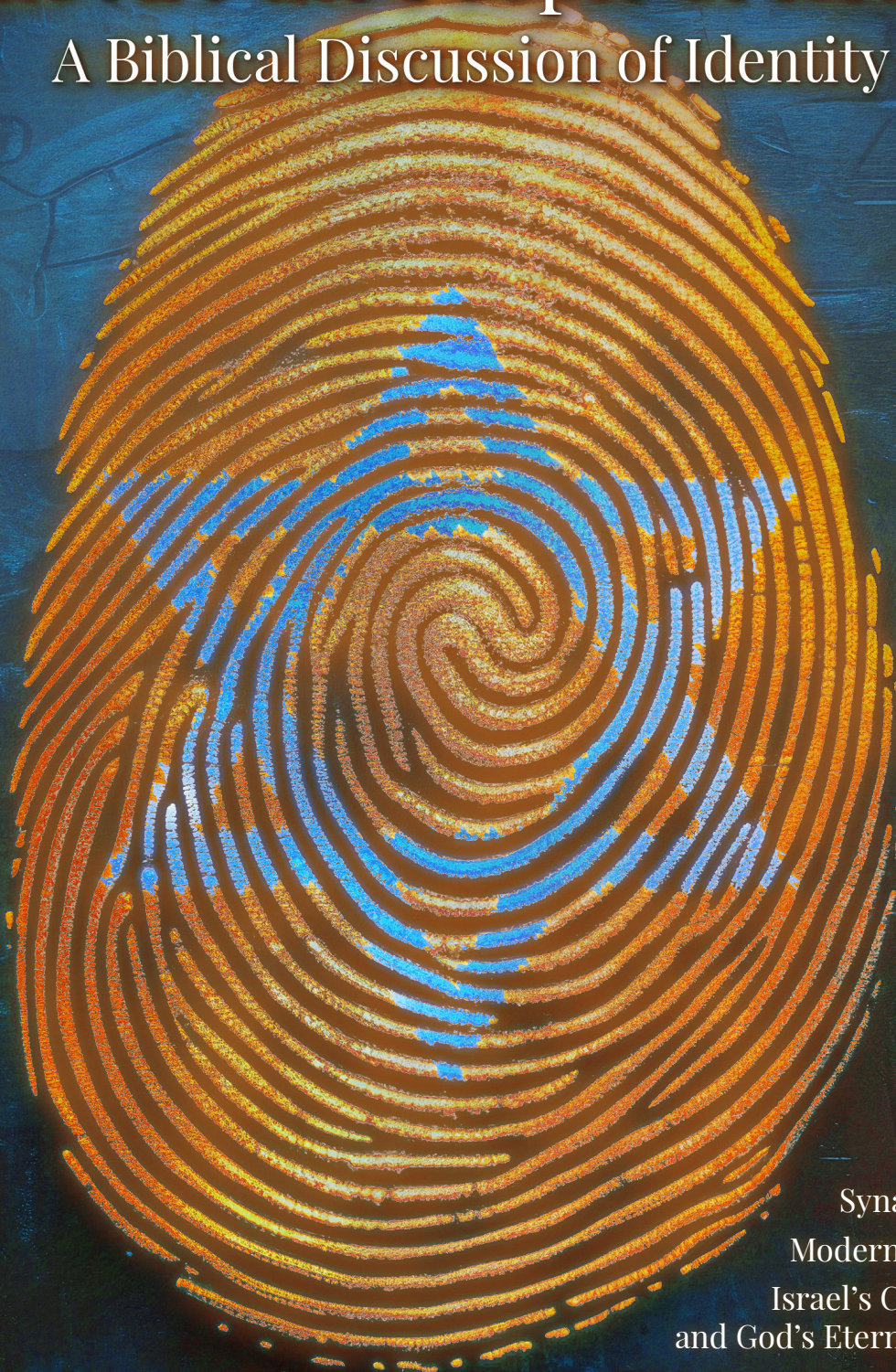


Ariel Magazine

Fall 2024 / Volume 1 / #52

 Ariel Ministries

Who Are the People of Israel? A Biblical Discussion of Identity



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08

Cover Story:

Who Are the People of Israel?

Dr. Jim Sibley examines the biblical material in order to arrive at some clarity regarding the nature of what it means to be a part of the people of Israel.



14

04 Ministry News

14 Feature:

Israel's Current Conflict and God's Eternal Plan (Part II)

Dr. Tim Sigler answers two important questions: Who is Hamas, and why are they terrorists? He concludes his article by offering a list of prayers all believers can bring before God in support of Israel.

20 Outreach:

Modern Jewish History – Era of Opportunity

Dr. Alan Shore explains that once the difficult hurdle of establishing the compatibility of Jewish identity and evangelical faith is overcome, believers have a much clearer path for the Lord to use them as instruments of the Holy Spirit in service to Messiah and His gospel.

20



28 Anti-Semitism:

What Is the Synagogue of Satan?

Mottel Baleston answers this question and refutes anti-Semitic prejudices and positions that can even be found in the evangelical church.

32 Trusting God:

Trusting in God's Word Amidst Chaos and Serving in Israel

Agustin Wainberg shares several practical ideas of how to serve one another in these dark times.



28

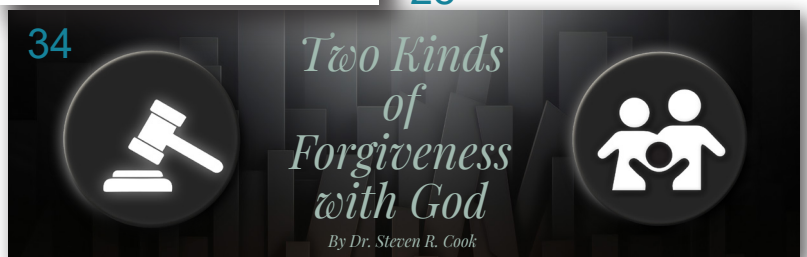
32

34 Bible Study:

Two Kinds of Forgiveness with God

Dr. Steven Cook elaborates on judicial and parental forgiveness in man's relationship with God.

34





Purpose Statement

Ariel Ministries exists in order to evangelize Jewish people and to disciple Jewish and Gentile believers through intensive Bible teaching from a Jewish perspective.

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Transition, the Rapture, and Stewardship

As I write this Editor's Letter, we are preparing for a significant transition in our ministry's leadership. On September 13th, Dr. Fruchtenbaum will entrust his life's work to his successor, Dr. Tim Sigler. As the founder of Ariel Ministries, Dr. Fruchtenbaum will continue to travel the world teaching and writing books, while Dr. Sigler will serve as the ministry's CEO.

I was blessed to spend three valuable weeks this summer at the Shoshanah Campus, where I observed Dr. Sigler in action. I'm delighted to report that he is not only a fantastic teacher but also deeply committed to raising up the next generation of equally capable instructors who will carry on Dr. Fruchtenbaum's teaching legacy.

Looking ahead, on October 2nd, the Jewish community will celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Feast of Trumpets. This holy day serves as a beautiful reminder that our Lord is coming soon to gather His bride. Yet, according to Matthew 24:36, only God the Father knows the time of the rapture. Therefore, Dr. Sigler is preparing for the potential delay in the Messiah's return, exemplifying the essence of true stewardship.

Regardless of their specific callings, God expects all believers to be good stewards. He entrusts us with certain responsibilities and makes us "managers" of His possessions. We are His co-workers (1 Cor. 3:9), and as such, we are invited to participate in His redemptive mission (Mt. 28:19-20).

Yet, none of what we do is dependent on our own strength. God empowers us through His *Ruach* to fulfill our stewardship. Without His enabling and guidance, our efforts would be in vain. As Paul said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). True stewardship means acknowledging that we are not our own. We belong to the Messiah, who gave Himself for us. Thus, stewardship is an expression of our total obedience to God.

Prayer is a crucial component of stewardship (1 Thess. 5:17). Dr. Sigler's significant responsibility in leading Ariel Ministries forward calls for our support in prayer. We invite all Arielniks to join us in praying for Dr. Sigler, ensuring that Dr. Fruchtenbaum's legacy continues to bless many—should the Lord tarry.

Christiane Jurik



Editor-in-Chief

Ariel Ministries

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Ariel Mission Branches & Representatives

MEET THE TEAM



03

ARIEL BRANCHES



Ariel Australia Chris & Lisa Savage

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Chris and Lisa Savage represent Ariel Ministries in Australia. Based in Victoria, they teach the Scriptures from the Jewish perspective in weekly and bi-monthly classes and day seminars.



Ariel Canada Jacques Isaac & Sharon Gabizon

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J. I. and Sharon Gabizon represent Ariel Ministries in Canada. Their projects include door-to-door evangelism of Jewish homes in Montreal and translating Ariel's manuscripts into French. Ariel Canada established a messianic congregation in Montreal called Beth Ariel.



Jackie Fierman

Jackie Fierman has been with Ariel Canada since January of 2005, traveling and sharing about the ministry and teaching its material in Canada and the U.S.A.



Ariel India Bakul N. Christian

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Bakul Christian represents Ariel Ministries in India and resides with his wife in Ahmedabad. Using Ariel's extensive teaching material, he expounds the Scriptures from a Messianic Jewish perspective in his home state. He is also responsible for the translations into the Gujarati language.



Ariel Israel Sasha & Lilian Granovsky

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The husband-and-wife team has been representing Ariel Ministries in Israel since October 2009. They are responsible for coordinating the translation of our manuscripts and books into Hebrew and Russian.



Ariel China

For safety issues, we must protect the identity of this branch. Please keep them in your prayers.



Ariel Germany

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Thanks to Manfred Künstler and his wife Hanna, Ariel Ministries has had a presence in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland since 1985. In 2002, the work was passed on to Georg Hagedorn who, eight years later, turned it into a full branch. Today, this branch is led by a team of brothers and sisters.



Ariel Hungary Ivan & Rita Nagy

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Ivan and Rita Nagy represent Ariel Ministries in Hungary. The husband-and-wife team has developed a Come & See website in Hungarian. They also host several home Bible study groups, teaching from Ariel's materials. Their goal is to make teachings available to Jewish and Gentile believers and unbelievers in Hungary.



Ariel Italy Paolo & Martina Speciale

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Paolo and Martina Speciale represent Ariel Ministries in Italy. The husband-and-wife team coordinates the translations of our manuscripts and books into Italian. Their goal is to share the Messianic Jewish perspective in Italy through live teaching, social media pages, and seminars.



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This branch is led by Johan Jansen van Vuuren, Nigel Christensen, Matthew Lord, Don Thompson, and John Cavanagh. For information about the many activities of this branch, please contact nz@ariel.co.nz.



Ariel Ministries Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas

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This branch is devoted to teaching the Word of God from a biblical Jewish perspective in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. They also travel throughout the United States. If you are interested in hosting a teaching session, symposium, or seminar, contact them at dfw@ariel.org.



Ariel Liberia Wion & Shirley Wleh

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Wion and Shirley Wleh represent Ariel Ministries in Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa. The husband-and-wife team teaches the Scriptures from a Messianic Jewish perspective in workshops, seminars, and weekly classes designed for pastors and laypersons alike.

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Joe is the supervisor of the Shoshanah Campus, which is the home of Ariel's School of Messianic Jewish Studies in Keeseville, NY. Every summer, he and his wife Cindy organize and host Ariel's ten-week Bible study program on campus.



Roberto Anchondo – Field Representative (El Paso, Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico)

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Roberto Anchondo represents Ariel Ministries in parts of the Southwest regions of the U.S. and some cities in Mexico. He is currently discipling groups of men in the Jewish perspective. He also works with numerous churches in Mexico, teaching the importance of standing by Israel.



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Missionary and author John Metzger represents Ariel Ministries in North Carolina. He is a teacher and speaker who actively travels throughout the central and eastern part of the U.S., speaking at various churches and conferences.



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Jack Nakashima represents Ariel Ministries in Rock Hill, SC. Previously serving in Israel, he is now available to teach and disciple in the U.S.



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Stephen Reynolds represents Ariel Ministries in the UK. The British Sign Language interpreter serves as a missionary in the Philippines and assists like-minded brethren in England in the establishment of dispensational churches.





**Ariel
Canada**
Jackie
Fierman

This year, I was blessed to be able to travel again within North America and share Ariel's teaching.

In March and April, I spent six weeks on two Hawaiian islands where I had previously taught. One of the main conferences was titled "Tools for Women in the End Times" and covered the following topics: "Pray Like Hannah," "Stand Strong Like Daniel," "Forgive Like Joseph," and "Have Faith Like Habakkuk." The women enjoyed the challenging teaching, breaking into small groups for discussion, and eating together as they always do in Hawaii. Each island saw multiple churches participate.

I also spoke to a variety of women's groups about the biblical origin, history, and end of anti-Semitism, explaining the background to the Middle East situation and what we see around the globe.

After two weeks at home in Montreal, where I could do door-to-door evangelism, I flew off to Edmonton, Alberta, for a month of speaking. The original reason for the trip was to teach at a women's retreat hosted by a supporting church. I talked about resting in positional truth, taught about the Abrahamic and New Covenants being the rock-solid foundation for our identity in Messiah, and included a special session on forgiveness. The pastor of the church reported that his wife was

"radiant" after the weekend, and she herself said that the teaching was life changing.



Jackie Fierman teaching in Hawaii



Nanette Keao (left) and Dana Galasso (right) helped organize and host Jackie Fierman's week on Kauai, where she did a "Tools for Women in the End Times" conference under a tent.



Vanessa Belen from Calvary Chapel Mililani organized this inter-church Seder meal for women and children on Oahu.

This positive feedback has blessed me greatly. Women from a different church, who had also attended the conference, indicated interest in inviting me to teach at their retreat as well. Both groups of women would like me to teach them Bible studies on Zoom in the fall.

As mentioned, the women's retreat was the primary reason to travel to Alberta. Another important opportunity was that I got to share my testimony with sixty-eight mostly unchurched teenagers. Rapt with attention, they listened carefully as they heard about God's supernatural intervention time and time again to bring me to faith in the Messiah. Quite a few told me how much they appreciated hearing the story. I pray that those who come from hurtful home situations will find healing in Yeshua.

Most people on my trips were very supportive of Israel, but sadly some were blatantly anti-Semitic and hostile. At a ministerial meeting where I introduced Ariel Canada to pastors, one reported that his members were saying, "Israel had it coming. After all, look at Hollywood." One woman asked if the Jews who "wanted to take over the world" were of "the synagogue of Satan." I taught her the meaning of Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 as well as the origins of the Treatise of the Elders of Zion tropes. I admit that I was emotionally unprepared for the level of prejudice that I heard from some women in evangelical churches. At the same time, I realize that my boss's words "This is why you need to teach, Jackie!" are true. We all need to teach the whole counsel of God in our spheres of influence (Acts 20:27).



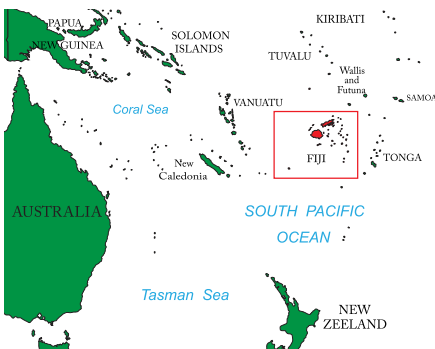
**Ariel
Australia
Chris & Lisa
Savage**

It's difficult to imagine that more than half of 2024 has now passed.

For both my wife Lisa and me, the start of the year was anything but quiet. Lisa's dad, Frederick, an evangelical Anglican minister, passed away suddenly on the 10th of January (he was in his ninetieth year), and my own mother, Mary, passed away less than fourteen days later; she was ninety-three. Both had put their trust in the Messiah many years ago, and they loved the Lord. Their funerals were celebrations of life, and the gospel was preached to all those who were present. We have the blessed assurance that we will see them again!

Now I'm literally off and running, having had a total knee replacement in April and exceeding my recovery timeline. I am thanking the Lord for His healing power and the skillful hands of my Jewish orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Freedman.

In June, Mick Cory, an Ariel Ministries Australia Board member, and I traveled to Fiji to speak at a pastors'



conference in Suva. Each year, pastors and leaders from across Fiji gather for five days of teaching. Mick received a specific request to deliver five sessions on eschatology, given that many pastors and leaders are lagging behind in this rich teaching. We are so blessed that, through Ariel Ministries and the extensive research and publications of Dr. Fruchtenbaum, there is no shortage of detailed teaching that can be presented.

Australia is often held up globally as a multicultural success story. All sides of politics constantly promote this narrative, and those who challenge it face disdain. However, since October of last year, we have seen outrageous demonstrations of anti-Semitism across Australia, with much of it very close to home. With more than 75,000 Jews living in and around the Melbourne Eruv, less than one hour from where we are based, weekly anti-Israel protests are now the norm. Universities are being held to ransom, and prominent Jewish schools and gathering places are being graffitied and attacked. Many within the Jewish community are choosing to conceal their Judaism for fear of being targeted. In response to this development, our focus for the remainder of 2024 is to continue to reach out to Jews and Gentiles and provide as much face-to-face contact as we can, as well as our ongoing Zoom teaching sessions each week. Providing intensive Bible teaching from a Messianic Jewish perspective is the key to answering the question "What is going on in this world?"



**Ariel
Hungary
Ivan & Rita
Nagy**

April was the most important month of the year for Ariel Hungary. After a long break, we were finally able to offer another Messianic conference. Many Hungarian believers eagerly awaited Dr. Fruchtenbaum's teachings. Two churches participated in the conference: a Brethren church, where Dr. Fruchtenbaum began his ministry in Hungary in 2007, and a Chinese church, where Ivan has been teaching for a few years now.



From left to right: Dr. Sigler, Dr. Rita Nagy, Dr. Fruchtenbaum, Bernice Sigler, and Ivan Nagy

Dr. Sigler and his wife, Bernice, also joined us, which was a blessing. We enjoyed fellowship with them, and the week was filled with both serious topics and a lot of laughter. Dr. Sigler actively participated in the teachings, presenting two topics: the current situation in Israel and God's plan for the ages. He also opened each session with a segment on Passover (as it was Pesach) and conducted a complete Passover demonstration with all the traditional elements.



Dr. Fruchtenbaum taught about the Messianic Kingdom. It was especially heartwarming to see the interest of the Chinese attendees who joined him for an extra Q&A session after the conference.

A Holocaust survivor attended one of the teachings despite having difficulty walking and said that the lectures by Arnold and Tim made it worthwhile.



Ivan Nagy translating Dr. Sigler's teaching into Hungarian

Volunteers helped us share the recordings on our home page.

Also in April, Jews for Jesus started a dialogue with a synagogue in Budapest. Rita has been studying Hebrew at this synagogue for many years. This year, the synagogue invited Rita to read from the *Megillah Ester* during Purim, a task that necessitated memorization of the text without vowel points. The synagogue's rabbi, Gabor, is very open to discussing topics with Christians, so this dialogue between Jews for Jesus and the synagogue did not necessarily come as a surprise, but we were still all very blessed to have the opportunity to participate. The first discussion dealt with Jews who believe in the Messiah and Jews who are waiting for the Messiah. During the Q&A session, Ivan asked a challenging question about the seemingly different goals of the Messiah's coming.

In May, we attended the synagogue

for the next event organized by Jews for Jesus. European leader Avi Snyder shared the podium with another Jewish rabbi from the Chabad Lubavitch sect. The main topic was "The Reason for the Coming of the Messiah." Ivan's question became a central topic, and Avi started his arguments by discussing the different reasons for the first and second comings.



Ivan Nagy translating Dr. Fruchtenbaum's teaching into Hungarian



Full house in Hungary



Jack Nakashima
Field Representative

Since October 7, 2023, I have been able to volunteer in Israel twice: two weeks in December 2023 and three weeks in March 2024 with my wife.

I first arrived within two months of the massacre, when emotions were still raw. People lived on the brink of

sobbing. The mere presence of foreigners during this time of war was a comfort to these aching hearts. Words of love from a stranger would elicit tears. There were so many ways we could show Israelis that we cared because everywhere we went, people were hurting. Hundreds of thousands had been displaced from the south *and* the north. The army had tripled in size by calling up not only the reserves but people who had finished reserve duty years before. Careers were interrupted, families torn apart, plans destroyed, and loved ones killed, injured, and taken hostage. Life was anything but normal.

When I returned to Israel in March, the tone had changed. Many soldiers had returned to their families and careers. Some of the displaced people were able to return home and start rebuilding. The shock of October 7 was gone but not the PTSD. Hearts weren't as fragile, but they were still breaking. The resolve to win the war was strong, but the frustration over holding hostages was growing stronger. We still had many ways to serve, and the gratitude for friends showing up was immense.

During both trips, I found that people were easy to talk with. There was a great deal of openness and appre-

ciation for our presence. Some talked of getting goosebumps when they met foreigners who came to help. The need for volunteers continued and continues. More than a hundred thousand people are still displaced, living in hotels where lobbies and meeting rooms have become their children's playgrounds and classrooms. Rockets are still being launched at Israeli cities, and hostages are still being held. The question "Why us?" lingers. Israelis need our love, our prayers, and our presence. This is the time to stand with Israel.



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Never a Take-Two with Dr. Fruchtenbaum

While filming a new online course, titled "The Book of Daniel," our videographer mentioned that he rarely needs to do a "take-two" with Dr. Fruchtenbaum. Normally, when filming online lectures, there is a need to re-shoot portions. Even with teleprompters, the best speakers and scholars sometimes stumble. However, such has not been the case with Dr. Fruchtenbaum. He has always been a "first-take pro," even from his earliest radio show in the mid-1970s, "The Christian Jew Hour."

Videographers greatly value "first-take pros" because, in addition to re-

ducing film time, they save a significant amount of time during the final editing work. This translates to reduced financial costs for ACB-MJS, making our courses both high quality and more cost effective.

"The Book of Daniel" is the nineteenth course we have completed. One of the original goals of Ariel's online courses division was to capture Dr. Fruchtenbaum's teachings on high-quality video and audio for future generations, as the Board of Directors wanted to preserve his outstanding teaching legacy. This new pre-recorded online course on Daniel is structured around sixteen modules of curriculum comprised of opening worship and prayers, learn-



There's talk in Hollywood.

ing objectives, required and optional readings, twenty-three video teaching presentations, life application assignments, Scripture memorization, optional study questions, open-book exams, and more.

Our online courses are designed to be accessible to everyone, anytime. For more information, you can email the administrator at Admin@ArielCollege.com or visit the college website at www.ArielCollege.com. We believe in empowering individuals to learn at their own pace and convenience.



Who Are the People of Israel?

A Biblical Discussion of Identity'

By Dr. Jim R. Sibley



Definitions can be tricky. When it comes to defining the Jewish people, definitions are especially fraught with difficulty, even with dissension. The modern State of Israel has its own parameters, Rabbinic Judaism has its rulings, and modern sociologists have theirs. In our day, questions of identity are often based on subjective feelings rather than on more objective realities. The answer to the question “Who is a Jew?” most often depends upon the identity of the one who raises the question. Yet, the topic is important because too often it impinges not only on biblical and theological issues but also on issues with sociological and missiological significance. Moving beyond the “Who is a Jew?” discussion, this article will examine the biblical material in order to arrive at some clarity regarding the nature of what it means to be a part of the people of Israel.

Before we can begin to define the Jewish people in a positive sense, it will be necessary to clear away false concepts that clutter the discussion and hinder our efforts to comprehend the biblical identity of this unique people.



What Israel and the Jewish People Are Not

A RACE. The Jewish people are not to be understood as a race.

Practically speaking, Jewish people today may be found with a variety of skin

pigmentations and other racial characteristics. There are black Jews, Jews who have Mongolian features, Jews who have Arab characteristics, and Jews who appear to be Europeans. God promised Abram that He would make of his descendants a “great nation” (Gen. 12:2). Moses referred to this great nation as the “house of Israel” (Ex. 16:31). So, they are a “house” or a “nation” but not a race.

The translations of the *NASB* and the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* in such references as 1 Peter 2:9 (“But you are a chosen **race**”) are debatable (cf. Mark 7:26 and Acts 7:19). The Greek term γένος (*genos*) refers to descendants of a common ancestor. *BDAG* suggests the following as the most likely translations: “ancestral stock,” “descendant,” “family,” or “relatives” and “nation” or “people.”² The translations of the Hebrew terms זֶרַע (*zera*) as “race” in Deuteronomy 10:15 and Ezra 9:2 and מְמִזֵּר (*mamzer*) as “race” in Zechariah 9:6 are likewise to be challenged. For the former, according to *HALOT*, the word means “offspring” or “descendants,” and the latter word means “Israelites of prohibited unions.”³

In 1991, “Operation Solomon” was a secret Israeli military operation to airlift more than 14,000 Ethiopian Jewish immigrants to Israel in the space of only thirty-six hours. These Ethiopian Jews were coming from very primitive conditions and extreme poverty. Nothing of modern society and culture was

familiar to them. They had to cope with a new language and a new culture, and they were introduced to modernity. After a year in Israel, a television journalist interviewed some of these immigrants and asked each the same question: “Since coming to Israel, what has been your most amazing discovery?” For one, it was the telephone; for another, it was television or the computer. Finally, he asked an old Ethiopian man this question. This man had a long white beard, a prayer shawl draped over his stooped shoulders, and a wooden staff with which he supported himself. He shook his head slowly before answering: “Well, before I came to Israel, I never knew Jews came in white!” The only Jewish people he had ever known were black! So, no, they are not a race.

A RELIGION. The Jewish people are not to be understood as merely adherents of Rabbinic Judaism. Although the majority of the Jewish people in some countries is more religious, in the United States and in Israel, it is more secular. Many Jewish people are agnostic or even atheistic. Some are deeply involved with New Age religions or with eastern religions, such as Buddhism, yet they would insist on their identities as Jews. The religious definition is totally inadequate, but it has long been used by Rabbinic Judaism.

When the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, Judaism had to be reformulated. The changes introduced by the religious leadership effectively led the peo-

¹ This article is based on a paper that the author presented at the Evangelical Theological Society in November 2023. The original text has been shortened and adapted to fit the format of this magazine.

² See Walter Bauer, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), “γένος,” p. 194.

³ See Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, et al, eds. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament [HALOT]* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), pp. 283 and 595.



ple further astray from biblical Judaism. Perhaps partly in reaction to the large numbers of Jewish believers in Yeshua, their “reforms” included a change in Jewish identity from an ethnicity to a religion. The practical effect was the empowerment to “excommunicate” Jewish believers in Yeshua. If one did not follow the precepts of the rabbis, he could be cut off from the Jewish people on the authority of the rabbis.

Of course, all efforts to undermine the Jewishness of Jewish believers in Yeshua fail. New Testament Scripture says, in Romans 2:28-29, that those Jews who are believers in Yeshua the Messiah are the ones who are not only ethnically Jewish but who are also spiritually Jewish.

The modern State of Israel has defined Jewishness on the basis of the rabbinic dictum that a person must be born to a Jewish mother or converted according to *halachah*. This standard has been undermined in recent years by several factors, such as a dramatic rise in the rate of intermarriage in the major countries of the Diaspora, immigration from the Soviet Union, and opposition from secular and non-Orthodox communities.⁴ This erosion of the standard rabbinic definition has contributed to the division witnessed in recent years in Israel.

Elements of Jewish Identity Construction

If the Jewish people are not to be defined by race or religion, how can they

be positively defined? There are six concepts that are essential for formulating a definition of the Jewish people.



1. The Election of the Patriarchs

God chose Abram and his descendants to be a special people for His purposes in the earth, but His choice did not include all of Abram’s descendants. Sometimes one son would be chosen but not another. For example, Genesis 21:12 says, “But God said to Abraham, ‘... *through Isaac* your descendants shall be named.’” In Exodus 3:15, God told Moses: “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac [not Ishmael], and the God of Jacob [not Esau], has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.”

Paul speaks of this narrowing of the lineage of the chosen people in his argument in Romans 9:6-13. Therefore, by virtue of God’s election of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and by virtue of the covenant that He made with Abraham (and which was reiterated to Isaac and Jacob), these patriarchs are considered the progenitors of the Chosen People, the people of Israel.

These two factors, God’s sovereign choice and His covenant with Abraham, are essential. The narrowing of the descendants of Abraham to Jacob and his descendants allows for Abraham to be “the father of many

nations” (Gen. 17:4-6). Of course, he is the father of the Ishmaelites and the Edomites (the descendants of Esau) as well as the Israelites. So, to be “of the seed of Abraham” is not necessarily to be of the seed of Jacob/Israel.⁵ It is not the Abrahamic Covenant alone that is essential but all the subsequent covenants that were founded upon it.

Paul addresses Gentile believers in Ephesians 2:11ff and tells them that prior to their salvation, they were “separate from Messiah” and “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.” Therefore, they were “strangers to the covenants of promise.” As such, they had “no hope” and were “without God in the world.” In Romans 9:4, Paul says that the following things belong to the Israelites: “the adoption as sons, and the glory of the covenants and the giving of the Law and the Temple service and the promises.” Finally, in Romans 11:29, the apostle states that the “gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” It seems that for Paul it was tremendously important to be a part of God’s *covenant* people, Israel, and for Gentiles to have access to and participation in the blessings of these covenants.



2. An Ethnic Group

The “nation” or “house” of Israel is an ethnic group with a shared lineage, language, history, and culture. The question is frequently raised: What is the difference between a race and an ethnic group?

⁴ For an excellent article documenting the failing attempts of the State of Israel to maintain an ethnoreligious definition of the Jewish people, see Netanel Fisher, “Who Is a Jew in Israel,” in Leonard J. Greenspoon, ed., *Who Is a Jew? Reflections on History, Religion, and Culture*, Studies in Jewish Civilization, Vol. 25 (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2014), pp. 129-140. See also, Yaacov Yadgar, *Israel’s Jewish Identity Crisis: State and Politics in the Middle East*, The Global Middle East (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁵ Gal. 3:26-29 speaks of believers in Yeshua as the seed of Abraham because we have the same faith, but this does not suggest that believers are the seed of Jacob or “spiritual Jews.”



The Cambridge Dictionary says that race is “based on physical characteristics” that people “are perceived to share such as skin colour, eye shape, etc.,” whereas an ethnic group refers to “a group of people who can be seen as distinct because they have a shared culture, tradition, language, history, etc.”⁶ A race, therefore, is more biological and physical, whereas an ethnic group is more cultural and sociological.⁷



3. Physical Descent

Even though the Jewish people are an ethnic group, physical descent is still of primary significance to any definition of the Jewish people. This “nation” or “house” was made up of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Of course, Jacob’s name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28), and it was the house of Israel, or the Israelites, that inherited the designation as the “Chosen People.”⁸ Therefore, the Jewish people *are* the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But we can’t stop there.



4. Patrilineal Descent

In Scripture, Jewishness was passed through the father, regardless of the race or ethnicity of the mother. If the father were Jewish, regardless of the race of the mother, the child would be viewed as *fully* Jewish. For example, Joseph married “Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On” (Gen 41:45, 50; 46:20). That she was an Egyptian did

not affect the Jewishness of the two sons born of this union, for Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen. 41:50–52), became the heads of two of the tribes of Israel.

This biblical perspective has largely been abandoned in Rabbinic Judaism, as the rabbis determine Jewishness primarily according to the Jewishness of the mother.



5. Gentile Fathers and Jewish Mothers

If Jewishness is passed down from the father, one might wonder about situations where the father is a Gentile but the mother is Jewish. This brings us to the issue of what the Bible calls either “the son of an Israelite woman” or “the son a Jewish woman.”

In Leviticus 24:10 and 16, we find that a situation arose in the camp of Israel involving blasphemy. Two young men were fighting, and one of them, in his anger or pain, blasphemed God. There were questions regarding what should be done to the offender. The primary issue was whether God’s law for Israel should be applied to him since he was of mixed parentage. His father was an Egyptian and his mother was an Israelite woman. The ruling was that he should be stoned for blasphemy, for this punishment applied to “the alien [גר] as well as the native [אזרח]” (v. 16). In arriving at this judgment, however, a clear distinction is made between “the son of an Israelite woman” [ישראלית] [בן אשה] and “a son of Israel [בן ישראל].”

Leviticus 24:10 says, “Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the sons of Israel; and the Israelite woman’s son and a son of Israel struggled with each other in the camp.” This individual was not considered “a son of Israel,” even though his mother was an Israelite.

In Exodus 1, we find the story of the Israelite midwives who were commanded to kill the sons of Israel and allow the daughters to live. Why were the daughters to be spared? Presumably, they were spared so that they would be able to intermarry with Egyptians. Of course, to both the ancient Egyptian and to the ancient Israelite, it would mean the total assimilation of the Jewish people. Biblically, and this is the essential point, the children of a Jewish father, *regardless of the race or ethnicity of the mother*, are 100% (and not merely 50%) Jewish. This helps explain why the Jewish people are not a race, and it should put an end to any talk about being a “pure-blooded” Jew.



6. Permeable Boundaries

In addition to physical descent, any definition of the Jewish people must also make allowance for the many Gentiles who attached themselves to the people of Israel throughout the period of the *Tanakh*. When Moses led the people from Egypt, there was a “mixed multitude” that left with the Israelites. Some may have intermarried with the Israelites (cf., e.g., Lev. 24:10–16), although in many cases, it is likely that these

⁶ *Cambridge Dictionary*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), s.v. “race” and “ethnic,” accessed November 10, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>.

⁷ The Scriptures that prohibit intermarriage (e.g., Deut. 7:3; Josh. 23:12; 1 Kgs. 11:2; Ezra 9:12) were designed to prohibit interethnic, or really, inter-religious marriages.

⁸ See also, Gen. 26:2–5, 24; 28:13–15; 35:10–12; and 49:1–33. In the Talmud, see *Sanh.* 44a.



WHO IS A JEW?			
Father	Mother	Child	Biblical Perspective
Jewish	Jewish	Jewish	A Jewish believer in Yeshua should not try to become a Gentile (see 1 Cor. 7:18-20).
Jewish	Gentile	Jewish	See Genesis 41:45-52.
Gentile	Jewish	"Son of an Israelite (Jewish) woman"	Such a person, though a believer, may be circumcised and be considered Jewish (e.g., re: Timothy, see Acts 16:1-3; see also Lev. 24:10ff).
Gentile	Gentile	Gentile	A Gentile believer should not attempt to become Jewish (see 1 Cor. 7:18-20; re: Titus, see Gal. 2:3).

Egyptians recognized the God of Israel as the one, true God, because of the plagues. Later, in Deuteronomy 23:7-8, the Lord stipulated that even Edomites or Egyptians who attach themselves to the people of Israel were able to enter the assembly of the Lord after the third generation.

There were also named individuals such as Ruth, Rahab, Uriah, and others. Their descendants were considered a part of the people of Israel as well. These Gentile additions to the Jewish people and their descendants have been a factor throughout Jewish history. This phenomenon requires more permeable boundaries in identity construction with respect to the Jewish people.

A Definition of the Jewish People

Now that we have considered these six essential concepts, we can come to a definition of Israel and the Jewish people. The Jewish people are an ethnic group composed primarily, though not exclusively, of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

They are an ancient, extended family in which language, culture, and religion play important, though not determinative, roles. The Jewish people are unique among the peoples of the world in that God has specially chosen them for His purposes in history. A biblical perspective on Jewish identity helps us to rightly divide the Word of God, and it also helps us to deal with practical issues regarding the status of Jewish believers in Yeshua. One way in which it can assist us in our understanding of Scripture may be illustrated with Acts 8 and the ministry of Philip among the Samaritans.

Samaritans

Many students of the Bible claim that the Samaritans were basically Gentiles with perhaps some slight connection to Judaism, and as such, they provide a transition to the account of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10), who was clearly a Gentile. For example, Richard Longenecker characterizes the Samaritans as "a dispossessed group within Palestine who were often considered by Jerusalem Jews as



Samaritan priests raise Torah scrolls.

'half-breeds.'"⁹ So, the Samaritans are not regarded as "fully" Jewish.

However, Acts 10 makes much of the fact that Cornelius was the first Gentile to receive the gospel. There is such attention to this in Acts 10 that we must conclude that the Samaritans were considered Israelites according to Luke.¹⁰

⁹ Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library [Zondervan], 1981), p. 355.

¹⁰ See Jacob Jervell, "The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel: The Understanding of the Samaritans in Luke-Acts," in *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), pp. 113-132. See also, Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 672.



The Samaritans were despised by the rest of the nation because their beliefs made them apostates. They rejected the Scriptures except for their own version of the Pentateuch, and they worshipped at Mt. Gerizim in Samaria rather than at the Temple in Jerusalem. Even so, they were fully Jewish, or to be completely accurate, they were fully Israelite.

In Acts 8, as a result of the preaching of Philip, there was an amazing evangelistic harvest among the Samaritans. Luke had already recorded mass conversions with the preaching of Peter in Acts 2 and 3. Jacob Jervell comments:

Here, too, the masses accept the gospel and give themselves whole-heartedly to it (8:6). But Luke goes beyond that. Simon Magus has deceived the entire population (8:9–11 [v. 10, “and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him.”]), but this entire population is baptized by Philip (8:12)... This in turn implies that for Luke all Samaria has also become an “orthodox” Jewish territory.¹¹

When the disciples from Jerusalem preached the gospel and Samaritans received salvation through trust in Yeshua, they were not only transformed from being lost to being saved, but they also went from apostasy to orthodoxy. The apostles, although from Galilee, were Judeans, and they were now joined with these Samaritan, or Israelite, brothers and sisters in their faith in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel. This

serves as a foretaste of a future—and greater—reunification of the tribes of Israel, as prophesied in Ezekiel 37:21–22. This understanding would be impossible without a biblical understanding of “Jewish” identity.

The Identity of Jewish Believers in Yeshua

The Jewishness of Jewish believers in Yeshua is often brought into question. Of course, Romans 2:28–29 says that those Jews who are believers in Yeshua the Messiah are the ones who are not only ethnically Jewish but who are also spiritually Jewish. In Paul’s analogy of the olive tree, they would be the natural branches that have not been broken off but are drawing life-giving sap from the root. This only demonstrates that Rabbinic Judaism is not essential to a biblical definition of the Jewish people.

A racial understanding of Jewishness distorts our understanding and affects biblical interpretation. A religious understanding of Jewishness is also a distortion that can have damaging effects. However, the major component of ethnicity that has not been addressed is culture. The reason is that Jewish culture is not entirely uniform across Diaspora communities nor across the centuries. In biblical times, the Temple exerted a greater influence than the synagogue, the Bible more than rabbinic tradition, Hebrew more than Yiddish. The seven species of produce from the Land of Israel are

mentioned but not bagels, latkes, sufganiyot, or challah. Harps are mentioned along with timbrel and lyre, but not fiddles and clarinets. Perhaps the greatest cultural continuity is provided by the biblical holidays, which continue to exert a tremendous influence and make a great biblical contribution to the rich cultural heritage of Israel.¹²

Without a doubt, the greatest contribution to Jewish identity is the One who is the embodiment of all Israel is to be: the Son of David, the Messiah. He is the only One who perfectly kept the Law and who has opened the door for Israel’s redemption.

May we pray for the day of which the Lord spoke through Jeremiah:

“In those days and at that time,” declares the Lord, “search will be made for the iniquity of Israel, but there will be none; and for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found; for I shall pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.” (Jer. 50:20)



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¹¹ Jervell, p. 125.

¹² Modern misconceptions that seek to identify the Jewish people based on a purely cultural definition will not be addressed here, as they are more patently false. Culture alone provides an insufficient basis for a definition from a biblical perspective. There also exists a rich diversity of expressions of Jewish culture due to centuries of life in the Diaspora. Also not addressed here is the problem of mixed marriages in Ezra 9–10, Neh. 13:23–31, and Mal. 2:10–12. This was not a situation where the foreigner expressed faith in God and a desire to join the people of Israel, and therefore, these marriages posed the dangers of spiritual defection and syncretism.



FEATURE

Israel's Current Conflict and God's Eternal Plan (Part II)

By Dr. Tim M. Sigler

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In months, not even years, since the atrocities of the October 7, 2023, Hamas massacre, the world quickly forgets. Quickly, the blame shifts toward Israel as violent war criminals rather than victims, and Hamas terrorists are portrayed as innocent civilian freedom fighters. But

discerning Bible believers should never forget the brutal and barbaric murders, sexual violence, and hostage taking as we seek to understand the hateful ideologies that promoted and perpetrated these atrocities. There is a lack of clear teaching and preaching about the role of Israel in

God's redemptive plan, about how to understand current issues in light of the teachings of Scripture, and about how to navigate biblically the ethical challenges that receive so much one-sided coverage in the culture at large.

I'm so grateful for my pastor friend outside the Washington,



D.C. area who contacted me while these events were still very fresh in the news cycle and invited me to address five important questions that he believed his congregation needed to be able to answer from

a Messianic Jewish perspective. This pastor's questions were so carefully chosen that readers of Ariel Magazine might also find them of value. In Part I (see the Spring 2024 issue), we considered

his first three questions: Why is Israel special to God? Who are the Palestinians? Are the Jews occupiers of Palestinian land? In Part II, we will address the last two items on his list.



WHO IS **HAMAS**, AND WHY ARE THEY TERRORISTS?

Founded in 1987, Hamas is an acronym for the Arabic phrase *Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyyah*, meaning the Islamic Resistance Movement. Contrary to popular claims, there is no connection to the word in the Hebrew Bible for “violence,” which hap-

pens to have the same pronunciation. One can be certain that this Islamic group did not intentionally choose a Hebrew word with which to identify themselves. Hamas emerged from an earlier group known as the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood,” and its fighters broke through the Gaza barrier, attacked Israeli military bases and homes, massacred civilians, and took over 240 hostages back to Gaza. “Hamas’s October 7 terrorist attack killed approximately 1,200 Israelis (and more have died in subsequent operations in Gaza and against Hezbollah), which is nearly 1.25 times the total number of Israeli fatalities during the entire five years of the Second Intifada.”¹ The numbers of fatalities are often downgraded by emphasizing that 373 were from Israeli security forces and only 757 were civilians, with 71 of those being foreign nationals—as if that lessens

the value of these lives that were brutally taken. Only days after the Hamas massacre, a “Harvard-Harris poll revealed that 51 percent of 18 to 24 year olds said Hamas’s violence against Israeli civilians was justified, while just 49 percent don’t think so.”² The campus protests that followed exposed a distortion of morality based on cultural Marxism that marks out groups of people as either oppressors or oppressed and then deems any violence by the so-called oppressed as justified in light of their oppression. In this twisted sense of social justice, Hamas’s brutality, violence, and bloodshed are acceptable because Israel somehow deserves it. Parents have to ask themselves,

“What in the world have my kids been learning at university?”

Of course, this moral confusion concerning the evils of terrorism against the Jewish state is not new. In 2018, there was an attempt to condemn Hamas for “acts of terror” at the United Nations. But this resolution failed. The United Nations has consistently passed one-sided resolutions against Israel for numerous human rights violations. “As of 10 January 2024, the Security Council has passed 2722 resolutions” in its entire history, and 227 of those have been about Israel. Since the creation of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2006, “it has resolved almost as many resolutions condemning Israel

¹ Daniel Byman, Riley McCabe, Alexander Palmer, Catrina Doxsee, Mackenzie Holtz, and Delaney Duff, “Hamas’s October 7 Attack: Visualizing the Data,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (Dec 19, 2023). See <https://www.csis.org/analysis/hamass-october-7-attack-visualizing-data#:~:text=Hamas's%20October%207%20terrorist%20attack,years%20of%20the%20Second%20Intifada>.

² Brad Polumbo, “An Insane Number of Gen Zers Support Hamas’s Slaughter of Innocent Israelis,” *Newsweek* (Oct. 24, 2023). See <https://www.newsweek.com/insane-number-gen-zers-support-hamass-slaughter-innocent-israelis-opinion-1837422>.

alone than on issues for the rest of the world combined.”³

This can only be characterized as a fixation on the illegitimacy of the world's one Jewish State and a predetermination to portray Israel's noble efforts as evil, as it has made valiant attempts to avoid collateral damage against noncombatants while carrying out its mission to eradicate Hamas. The UN General Assembly further revealed its anti-Israel sentiment by refusing to adopt an amendment condemning the October 7 terrorist attacks by Hamas.⁴ Only as of late January 2024 did several countries (including the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) suspend their funding of the UNRWA after Israel produced documentation revealing the direct participation of UNRWA workers in the atrocities of October 7.⁵ Further, a number of European countries have decided to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state without the prerequisite of a negotiated peace with Israel. What moral good could ever come from rewarding a population that celebrated in the streets after the Hamas massacre and has continually called for the elimination of the State of Israel?

William L. Shirer, in his masterful analysis of Nazi Germany titled *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, makes a chilling observation: “Not every German who bought a copy

of *Mein Kampf* necessarily read it... But it might be argued that had more non-Nazi Germans read it before 1933 and had the foreign statesmen of the world perused it carefully while there was still time, both Germany and the world might have been saved from catastrophe.”⁶ This is why discerning Bible believers should read the Hamas Charter (see below)!

According to Scripture, this unique hatred of the Jewish people did not

begin with Hamas or Hitler. This “oldest hatred” began with the head of the heavenly rebellion in the Garden of Eden when the Lord announced His plan to destroy the seed of the serpent through the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). As the archenemy of the divine plan, the adversary would do whatever was necessary to thwart what the Lord had promised. As soon as it was revealed that God would bless Abraham with the promised seed through whom

HAMAS CHARTER



Complete destruction of Israel for the liberation of Palestine and the establishment of a theocratic state based on Sharia law



Unrestrained and unceasing holy war (jihad) to attain the above objective



Deliberate disdain for and dismissal of any negotiated resolution or political settlement of claims to the Holy Land



Reinforcement of anti-Semitic tropes and conspiracy theories⁷

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_Nations_resolutions_concerning_Israel.

⁴ “General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling for Immediate, Sustained Humanitarian Truce Leading to Cessation of Hostilities between Israel, Hamas | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” *United Nations*, Press Officers, 27 Oct. 2023, press.un.org/en/2023/ga12548.doc.htm.

⁵ “What Is UNRWA and Why Are Some Countries Suspending Its Funding?” *Reuters* (Jan 30, 2024). See <https://www.reuters.com/world/what-is-unrwa-un-palestinian-refugee-agency-2024-01-29/>; and Matthew Mpoke Bigg, “How UNRWA Donor Countries Have Responded to Israel's Accusations,” *New York Times* (Jan. 28, 2024). See <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/28/world/middleeast/unrwa-funding-pause-countries-israel-gaza.html>.

⁶ Cited in Bruce Hoffman, “Understanding Hamas's Genocidal Ideology,” *The Atlantic* (Oct. 10, 2023). See <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/10/hamas-covenant-israel-attack-war-genocide/675602/>.

⁷ Adapted from Bruce Hoffman, “Understanding Hamas's Genocidal Ideology,” *The Atlantic* (October 10, 2023).



He would bless all the families of the earth, Satan began his opposition to the Jewish people. As Dr. Fruchtenbaum has summarized, "Satan's war against the Jews between Abraham and the first coming was to try to thwart the first coming (Rev. 12:1-5). His present and future war against the Jews is to thwart the second coming (Rev. 12:12-14)."⁸ The nature of anti-Semitism is satanic to the core.

Is the Current Conflict the Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy?

Is this the prophecy of Ezekiel 38–39 unfolding before our very eyes? In his comprehensive study of the sequence of prophetic events titled *Footsteps of the Messiah*, Dr. Fruchtenbaum provides helpful context and explanation. "Ezekiel 38:1–39:16 describes an invasion of Israel from the north and the subsequent destruction of the invading forces once they reach the area of the mountains of Israel."⁹ "The most controversial question in the context of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is *when*: when in the chronology of prophecy will the Russian invasion occur?"¹⁰ Noting that the conditions are right for this assault against Israel to happen even in our present days now that Israel once again exists as a nation, he states, "The Russian invasion is another birth pang that will occur before the tribulation begins."¹¹ However, he refuses to speculate about current events from world news in seeking to interpret Bible prophecy.

Two principles regarding understanding the times in light of Bible prophecy

should always be kept in mind. First, we always understand prophecy better after the fact, or as the American baseball player and cultural philosopher Yogi Berra has been credited with saying, "It's difficult to make predictions, especially about the future." Second, we should live today like the time is now. Several Scriptures are representative of the full counsel of God on this matter.

Messiah's return is always presented in Scripture as a great motivation to action, not as a reason to cease from action. We should work while we wait for Him. As Yeshua taught His disciples, "We must carry out the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming, when no one can work" (Jn. 9:4). Paul also instructed the believers in Corinth in light of his teaching on the rapture of the church as follows: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Similarly, the Thessalonian believers were warned, "For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then, let's not sleep as others do, but let's be alert and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk, get drunk at night. But since we are of the day, let's be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:5-8). As we work and watch, we should also pray, as Yeshua

counseled His disciples, "Keep watching and praying, so that you do not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:41). Turning to the Lord in prayer should always be the response of God's people in the face of the trials and terrors of this world.

Especially in light of political realities that affect our personal and collective well-being and the progress of the gospel, believers are instructed to pray for governmental leaders. Paul wrote to Timothy as a matter of priority: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Further, we can recall the instructions of King David: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! 'May they be secure who love you!'" (Ps. 122:6).

How to Pray for Israel's Current Conflict

Scripture often encourages believers to call out to the Lord and to let our requests be made known to God (Phil. 4:6-7). We are also cautioned that at times we do not have because we have not asked (Jas. 4:2-3). What might be some urgent requests that the current crisis in Israel would motivate God's people to come to Him and call out to Him in our time of need?

⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: the Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Revised; San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2022), p. 758.

⁹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* (Revised; San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2022), p. 110.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.



May God be
pleased to answer
our prayers
according to
His will.

- ✧ *Pray for the safe release of hostages.*
- ✧ *Pray for the safety of Jewish people globally.*
- ✧ *Pray for the success of the IDF as they defend Israel.*
- ✧ *Pray the terrorists will turn to Yeshua and do right.*
- ✧ *Pray for Gaza's liberation from Hamas.*
- ✧ *Pray that this crisis will draw many in Israel and Gaza to saving faith in Messiah Yeshua.*



Dr. Tim Sigler has been studying and teaching about the land and people of Israel for 35 years. Before joining Ariel Ministries, he was Provost and Dean at Shepherds Theological Seminary after nearly two decades as Professor of Hebrew and Biblical Studies at the Moody Bible Institute. While in Chicago, he also served as an elder at Olive Tree Congregation.



Modern Jewish

In the summer of 1974, coming to the end of a solo backpack/Eurail pass on-the-cheap tour of the cities of Western Europe, I arrived in Paris, checked into a dormitory hostel that happened to be located in a church, and arose after a deep and peaceful sleep the next morning to discover I had been robbed of every bit of money and every scrap of identification. I then made a wild decision. I would not seek help in a conventional manner, and, offering the first authentic prayer of my life, I told God, “If you’re up there, I’m down here. The ball is in your court.”

To make a long story short, I met someone who, over the course of the next few days, unfolded the gospel to me in a way that was both comprehensible and compelling. But here is the important part. She shared the gospel as a Jew might need to hear it, and by doing so, she affirmed my Jewish identity. I still sense that affirmation after almost fifty years as a Jewish gospel believer.

As I delved more deeply into the modern Jewish-Christian encounter, I began to reflect that not much more than a couple of centuries or so ago, such a form of gospel witness would have been nonexistent. It was understood that Jews who became Christians were required to reject their Jewishness. I also came to realize that, prior to the 19th century, Jews in Western Europe (and even more so in Eastern Europe) were well insulated from authentic gospel witness. There would have been no space for the 20th-century kind of encounter I had where it could have occurred.

So what changed?

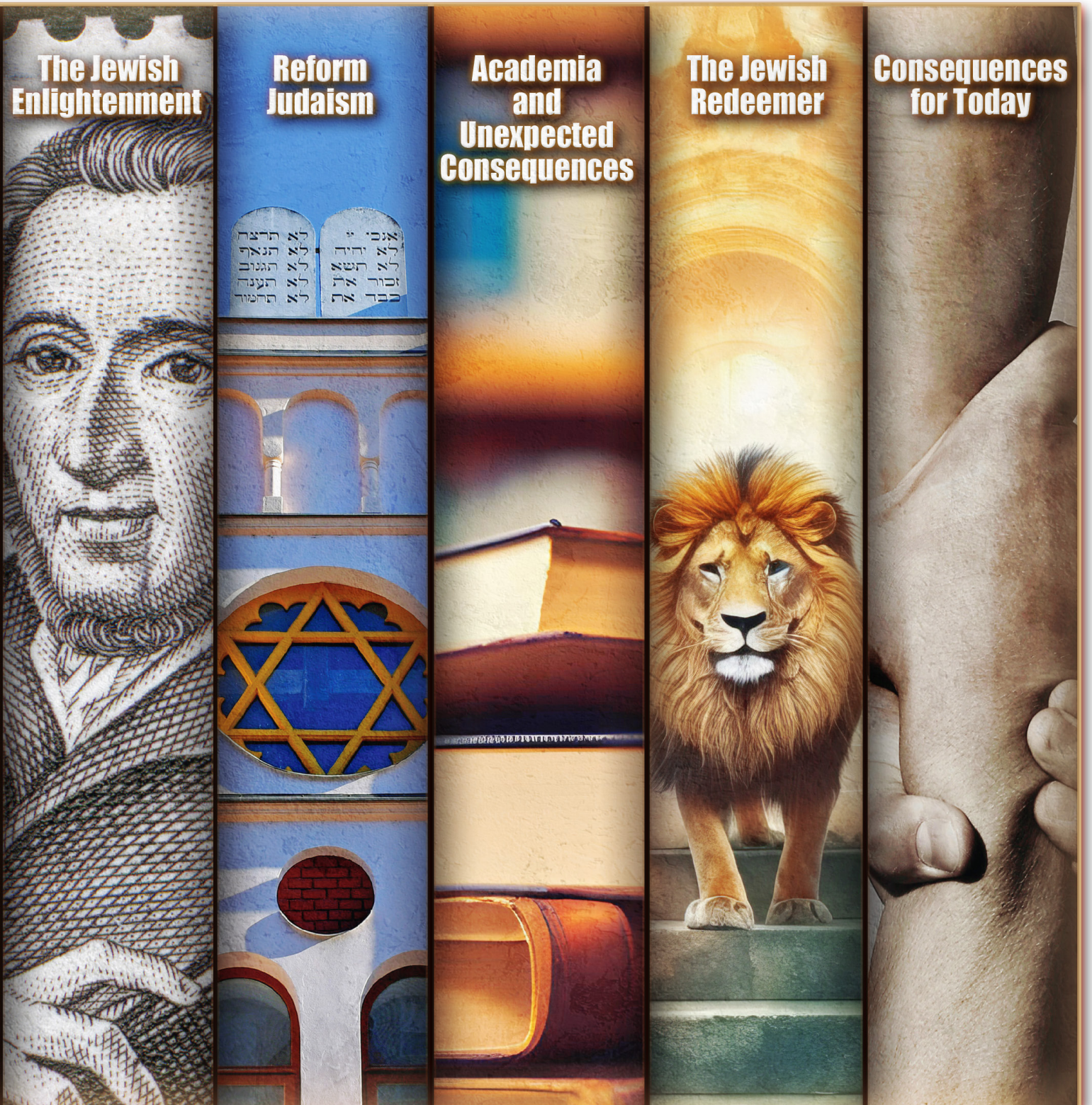
How did the position of the Jews move from that of an “alienated minority,” in historian Kenneth Stow’s apt phrase, to a “something else” that created room for Jewish believers in Yeshua to remain Jewish and even grow as such?



History

Era of Opportunity

By Dr. Alan M. Shore



New Ground Rules through the Reformation



It began as a matter not born of preference but of necessity. The Protestant Reformation, beginning with Martin Luther and his 95 theses in 1517, posed a new set of political and religious challenges. The resulting post-Reformation wars took a terrible toll on European society. The Thirty Years War between the Protestant and Catholic States of Central Europe had produced a stalemate. The realization that no clear victory on any side was possible led to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which authorized the sovereign ruler of a given region to establish the church of his choice during his reign. Importantly, it also provided a limited freedom of private worship for Calvinists, Lutherans,

or Catholics who stood outside the religious preference of the ruling power.

One of the perhaps unintended consequences of these new ground rules was that religious toleration among warring Christians would come to extend somewhat to Jewish subjects as well. This new freedom of worship, first conceived as a privilege, would soon take the form of natural, legally codified rights in the Western European nation-states that would emerge in the next two centuries. It was the beginning of the modern era.

Modernity represents a departure from the previous ways in which people experienced reality. The heart of the modern outlook is that it does not hold itself captive to the past. A modern outlook thinks itself freer to define and redefine itself based not upon time-honored traditions or religious creeds but upon the agency it chooses to exercise in formulating its own definitions of society.

The world was changing, and the place of the Jews would change along with it. The arrival of Modernity opened previously locked doors, leading to a new, unexplored terrain of Jewish-Christian encounters that contained surprises for both sides of the equation and a new shape for things to come.



The Enlightenment



Modern thinking was more fully articulated in what has been termed “The Enlightenment.” In a nutshell, this is its creed: Humanity, guided by the light of reason, could explain natural phenomena and understand a world from which mystery had been evacuated and superstition vanquished. This ideology posed a direct threat to the existing powers of the aristocracy and the church.

Enlightenment thought also began to reject specific religious creeds and think in terms of universal human values. If only religions could cast aside the outmoded dogmas that separated them and focus on their commonalities, then they could find a universal religion

and creed to which all could subscribe.

The rise of this movement would affect the development of Jewish culture from the mid-eighteenth century and forward. Among the emerging nation-states, there arose a consideration of the possible role for Jews as more fully integrated members of the brave new world that enlightened thinking promised.

The Jewish Emancipation



The restructuring of the political systems of Western Europe that began in the eighteenth century was closely linked to conceptions of human rights, citizenship, and representative government. These ideas, developed by

Enlightenment thinkers, found outward expression in a widespread political impulse to achieve the liberation of Jews from the isolation of the ghettos. This was known as the Jewish emancipation, whose goal was “the abolition of disabilities and inequities applied specially to Jews”¹ beginning in about 1740 in places like France, England, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Italy, and Germany.

This movement engendered a re-evaluation of the position of the Jews across Western Europe. If Jews were to be integrated into civil life, then Christians would be required to set aside long-held prejudices. An equally important part of the deal was that Jews would have to change as well. The promise of full citizenship and upward social and economic mobility would come at the expense of the beliefs, rituals, and strategies that had, for so long, preserved Jews as a people set apart from the nations.

In practical terms, both sides of the pact were incompletely carried out. Idealism never really triumphed over social, cultural, and religious reality. However, even partial success had a lasting effect on modern Jewish identity, particularly in Germany, beginning in the 1770s with the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment.



The Jewish Enlightenment



The father of the *Haskalah* is generally considered to be Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), the leading figure of the Berlin Enlightenment. As the recipient of a major prize awarded to him by the Berlin Academy of Science in 1763, he was a figure who enjoyed the respect not only of the Jewish community but also that of the wider society that he was determined to enter on behalf of his co-religionists. His home became a salon visited by Jew and non-Jew alike.

As the *Haskalah* gained traction in Jewish life, the first issue to generate heated controversy was that of education—the question of whether sec-

¹ “Emancipation,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, The Gale Group, 2007; jewishvirtuallibrary.org/emancipation.



ular studies ought to be recognized in Jewish life vs. only Torah study. The *Maskilim*, the proponents of the *Haskalah*, viewed secular education as a passport to Jewish integration and full participation in modern society. This could not be achieved so long as Jewish men buried themselves solely in Torah study.

In response to the accelerating changes being wrought in the West, Mendelssohn discerned a need to reconfigure Jewish faith and, in so doing, create a path for full participation in Christian society. He thought the “old-time religion” of Jewish faith and practice needed to be reformed and power wrested from traditional Jewish communal authorities in order for such reforms to progress. From Mendelssohn’s viewpoint, the problem was not only that the non-Jewish world shunned the Jews but that traditional Jews also shunned the non-Jewish world. They were deeply suspicious of what they perceived to be the impurities of the Gentile world and the threat it presented to traditional Jewish life, not only in terms of its hostility. Threats can come in many forms. The allure of the non-Jewish world could be as threatening, if not more so, than simple persecution. The walls of the ghetto had not only kept Jews inside; they had kept the rest of the world out. Now that border had been breached. It was at this point that the making of modern Jewish identity truly began to accelerate. As it turned out, Mendelssohn’s followers would soon precipitate a much more complete break with traditional Jewish faith and practice than Mendelssohn himself would have ever imagined or wanted. The cat was out of the bag.

Reform Judaism



In addition to the Enlightenment and the corresponding *Haskalah* and the drive toward Emancipation, there arose a corresponding movement in religious life: Reform Judaism. If Jews wanted to move with the times, aspects of Jewish religious faith and practice that had served for centuries to preserve a sense of Jewish separateness deemed essential to Jewish survival needed to change with the times. The question arose: What should or could be kept?

One of the governing principles of Reform Judaism is the idea that Judaism can be shaped to meet the needs of Jews from generation to generation. The past does not dictate the future—or the present, for that mat-

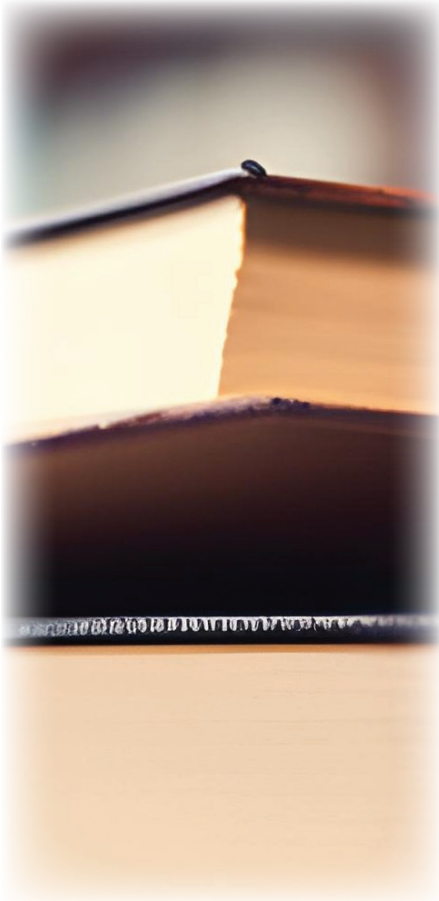
ter. Reform Judaism sought to provide a way for Jews to remain functioning members of a religious community and not abandon tradition, even as it sought to reform itself. Seeking respectability, Jews turned to the church to copy its style, retaining a Jewish flavor. Many ideas, such as the addition of organ music, sermons, and choirs, came from churches, and even the architecture of the opulent Reform Temples (as these houses of worship were called) was copied. By the 1840s, a trained Reform rabbinic leadership was functioning in Central Europe.

So, the great debate was joined, and it continues in Jewish life to this day. What is essential to Judaism? A Hebrew liturgy? Not according to Reform Jews. Strict adherence to Talmudic law? Not according to Reform Jews. *Kashrut*? Not according to Reform Jews. What then?

Reform Judaism chose a set of principles to define itself. These included social values derived from a reading of the Hebrew prophets and what might be called “ethical monotheism.” This became, for some, the justification for a revised Jewish identity—the mission of the Jewish people to convey these universal values to the world.

This revised religious content, which was deeply informed by Enlightened values, needed more. Therefore, it also attempted to retain a sense of solidarity with what it conceived of as a historical Jewish civilization. The elevation of this new understanding did not come without cost. To achieve it, perceptions of Jewish exceptionalism had to be jettisoned, as well as belief in a literal Messiah and a return to Zion by the redeemed of the Lord.

Academia and Unexpected Consequences



The quest to find a place at the table of modern Western European culture did not stop with religious reform. Just as Reform Judaism sought to acknowledge and respond to the outside world with an altered religious perspective that could serve to anchor Judaism in the here and now of modern society, the agenda of an emerging cadre of highly qualified Jewish scholars was to raise Judaism's stature in academia by meeting the highest standards of European scholarship and thereby winning its approval and recognition. This work of the second generation of the *Haskalah* was the genesis of Jewish studies: Bible criticism, Talmud, Jewish literature of all periods, religious philosophy,

archaeology, and other disciplines. Jews, for the first time in their history, began to employ the tools of Christian historical scholarship to tell their own story. This led to some unexpected consequences.

By stepping into the world of non-Jewish modern historical scholarship, paradoxically, Jewish scholars for the first time equipped themselves to become not only interpreters of Jewish history but also of Christian origins. By using the tools fashioned by Christian academics for the sake of making themselves presentable to them, they struck gold when they arrived at the first century of the common era. They encountered Yeshua of Nazareth, a Jew whom the Christians took as their Savior. Now, for the first time, Yeshua came under the scrutiny of Jewish scholarship.

It shook things up. Christian theologians, long accustomed to writing treatises dissecting the history and nature of Judaism, were unaccustomed to having their own religion come under the gaze of Jewish scholars who knew things about the Jewish context of the life and ministry of the Christian Savior that they were ignorant of. For them, this was the height of insolence and incivility. One might have thought these liberal Christian scholars would have welcomed the fruits of Jewish scholarship. Not so. Their prejudice would not permit it.



The Jewish Redeemer



Another border had been breached. Jesus—the Jewish Jesus—was now a legitimate subject of Jewish examination, not as the Christian Redeemer but as a living, breathing, first-century Jew. The examination of His Jewishness took place not only in scholarship but also spilled over into art. This can be seen in the vivid crucifixion paintings of Marc Chagall (1887–1985), which depict Yeshua in the posture of Jewish martyrdom. It can also be seen in the works of Sholom Asch (1880–1957), who roiled his Yiddish readership and critics with his controversial “Christological Trilogy,” which features a complete “re-Jewishing” of the characters and story of the New Testament, starting with Yeshua himself.



Consequences for Today

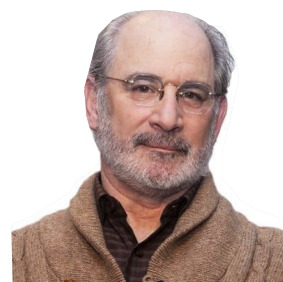


So, where does this development carry us today? In less than 250 years, Jews have moved from what was tantamount to virtual isolation from a true encounter with the gospel of a Jewish Messiah. Although Jewish believers still deal with a mixed reception, we are making inroads toward acceptance as fellow Jews.

For example, Chosen People Ministries has sponsored several symposiums featuring highly reputable mainstream Jewish scholars. Furthermore, the broader environment of shifting Jewish life and culture has become increasingly open to the message of the Jewish Messiah portrayed in the New Testament. A survey conducted

by Pew Research Center in 2013 found that fully one-third of those questioned agreed that one can still be Jewish if he or she believes that Jesus is the Messiah. According to an article in *The Jerusalem Post*, this includes the 21% of Jewish millennials who think that “Jesus was God in human form who lived among people in the 1st century.”² Put simply, Yeshua is not nearly as “scary” for Jews as He used to be.

To sum up, the same forces that have shaped modern perceptions of reality for all of us have also influenced Jewish identity, for better and for worse. Once the difficult hurdle of making the case for the compatibility of Jewish identity and gospel faith—which was utterly unthinkable before the modern era—has been overcome, we have a much clearer path for the Lord to use us as instruments of the Holy Spirit in service to Messiah and His gospel.



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² TJA, “Study: One-fifth of Jewish Millennials Believe that Jesus Is the Son of God,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 1, 2017; <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/study-one-fifth-of-jewish-millennials-believe-jesus-is-the-son-of-god-512015>.

UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE FROM A MESSIANIC JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

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Every discerning believer understands that since the barbaric attack by Hamas terrorists against Israel on October 7, 2023, anti-Semites have felt emboldened to crawl out from under their rocks and publicly make not only anti-Israel statements but actually call for violence against Jewish people who have nothing to do with the land of Israel. We have always clearly said that there is a place for legitimate criticism of some of Israel's policies. Israelis do this all the time. However, recent statements have become clearly racist as various groups agitate against Jews worldwide. For those of us who are Jewish believers in Messiah Yeshua, this is not a theoretical issue but one that is very real, and something we experience more frequently. It can be quite upsetting.

Recently, a Jewish believer I know, who is involved in full-time evangelical ministry, reported hearing bold statements that were clearly anti-Semitic in an otherwise Bible-believing church. The particular phrase used was that Jewish people who have not yet come to faith in Messiah Jesus are the "Synagogue of Satan." That particular phrase is most often found in the propaganda by racists of various stripes as an attempt to agitate against the Jewish people as an entire group. The same racists frequently also agitate against other racial minorities, albeit in different ways. However, when used by people who claim to be Christians, the phrase often refers to the following two verses found in many English translations of the book of Revelation:

"I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9). "Behold, I will cause those of the syna-

gogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you" (Rev. 3:9).

Variety Within the Jewish Community of the First Century

Before attempting to understand these verses, we must remember that the Jewish community of the first century, from which the Messiah and the apostles came, was not uniform but diverse, with conflicts that sometimes turned violent. Many would be shocked to know that in the year 103 B.C., the Hasmoneans, the predecessors of the Sadducees, were locked in a struggle with the Pharisees for dominance within Judaism. A wealthy Sadducean prince, Alexander Jannai, had eight hundred Pharisees crucified after he took power that year. Similar struggles would go on for hundreds of years and are even on display in the New Testament.

When outsiders of that day looked at the struggle between the Jewish believers in Yeshua and those who held to Rabbinic Judaism during the first century, that contest seemed familiar. It was consistent with the pattern they had seen in Judaism. Each group claimed to be the inheritors of the mantle of biblical faith. The rhetoric that one sometimes encounters in historical Jewish literature between different Jewish groups actually makes the language of the New Testament sound mild. At the same time, it must be always kept in mind that this was an intra-family struggle, with one group of Jews asserting Yeshua was the Messiah and the other group denying it.

Even in the New Testament, when we

see conflicts between Jewish believers in Yeshua and those in mainstream Judaism, that conflict was not "Christianity against Judaism," because the definition of those two terms only came into their current form five hundred years after the New Testament narrative. Too often, people read of these New Testament conflicts between these two Jewish groups as a conflict between what we now call "Christianity" and "Judaism." Once again, they forget this was an intra-family dispute. They also forget that since that time there have been over one thousand years of violent persecution by the powerful and often corrupt institutional denominations of Christendom against defenseless Jewish communities in Europe. That sort of institutional Christendom also often persecuted Bible-believing, genuine Christians. Again, the New Testament narrative must be read within the context of an intra-family Jewish struggle over a central question: Was Yeshua our promised Messiah?

The Use of the Greek Word *Synagógē*

A most important matter is the use of the Greek term συναγωγή (*synagógē*) in the New Testament. In the development of Koine Greek, initially the word simply referred to a gathering of people, not one that was necessarily Jewish but could certainly be Jewish. In James 2:2, for example, it appears in the original text to designate a gathering of Jewish believers in Yeshua, and most English versions translate the term as "assembly" or "meeting." However, in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, the same translations opt to translate the negative connotation of *synagógē* and



render the term as “synagogue,” a word now considered exclusively Jewish.

Do you see what’s happening there? It is like the artwork of the Renaissance period showing New Testament scenes. The Jewish apostles of Yeshua are shown looking very fair-skinned and European, whereas Jewish people who are not believers are depicted in less than flattering images. In reality, it was the same ethnic group. Those painters were exposing their bias, as are some translators, when they “spin” the translation to put Jewish people in a negative light in the two passages in Revelation.

Would Messiah Have Worshipped in a Synagogue of Satan?

For those who take an extreme anti-Semitic view and regard Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 as speaking of Jewish people, they have a mammoth problem in that Messiah Yeshua grew up wor-

shipping in the synagogue in Nazareth. Mary and Joseph also brought Him up to Jerusalem for Jewish worship services when He was twelve years old. The apostle Paul entered Jewish synagogues throughout the book of Acts for worship, saying that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews of the tribe of Benjamin, and in that context, he also delivered the good news of the arrival of our Messiah. Would Yeshua and Paul have participated in these ceremonies in a “Synagogue of Satan”?

What Was the Situation that Revelation Addresses?

Even in good evangelical commentaries that take a literal approach to interpreting the Scriptures, there is much diversity on how to understand the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 1, 2, and 3. Are the conditions and warnings mentioned specifically applicable to those geographic locations and assemblies? There are some

good scholars who hold this view. Are these seven churches representative of seven church ages throughout history? This view has been popular in some of our circles but is increasingly being questioned.

It may well be that the two instances in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, which refer to “those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not,” may be alluding to specific situations in Smyrna and Philadelphia, where a group of people who claim to be ethnically Jewish—believing it would grant them favored standing with God but who were not actually Jewish—were harassing the believers in those two churches. There were many such schisms during the first century, some of which are referenced in the book of Acts.

Because we understand that in the first century, the word “synagogue” did not carry the modern religious understanding of being exclusively Jewish, it is easy to see that this was a gathering of individuals who were harassing the believers and whose doctrine was distinctly in error. No one should exploit that local situation to justify racist bigotry against Jews today. Yet there are believers who embarrass themselves by maintaining just that position.

Of course, many who hold on to prejudice against the Jewish people believe that passages such as Romans 2:28-29 teach that all born-again believers become spiritual Jews. This wrong view helps them label non-believing Jews as the “synagogue of Satan.” In the twisted minds of some church members, this type of twisting of Scripture even justifies the Holocaust. That error of replacement theology completely ignores

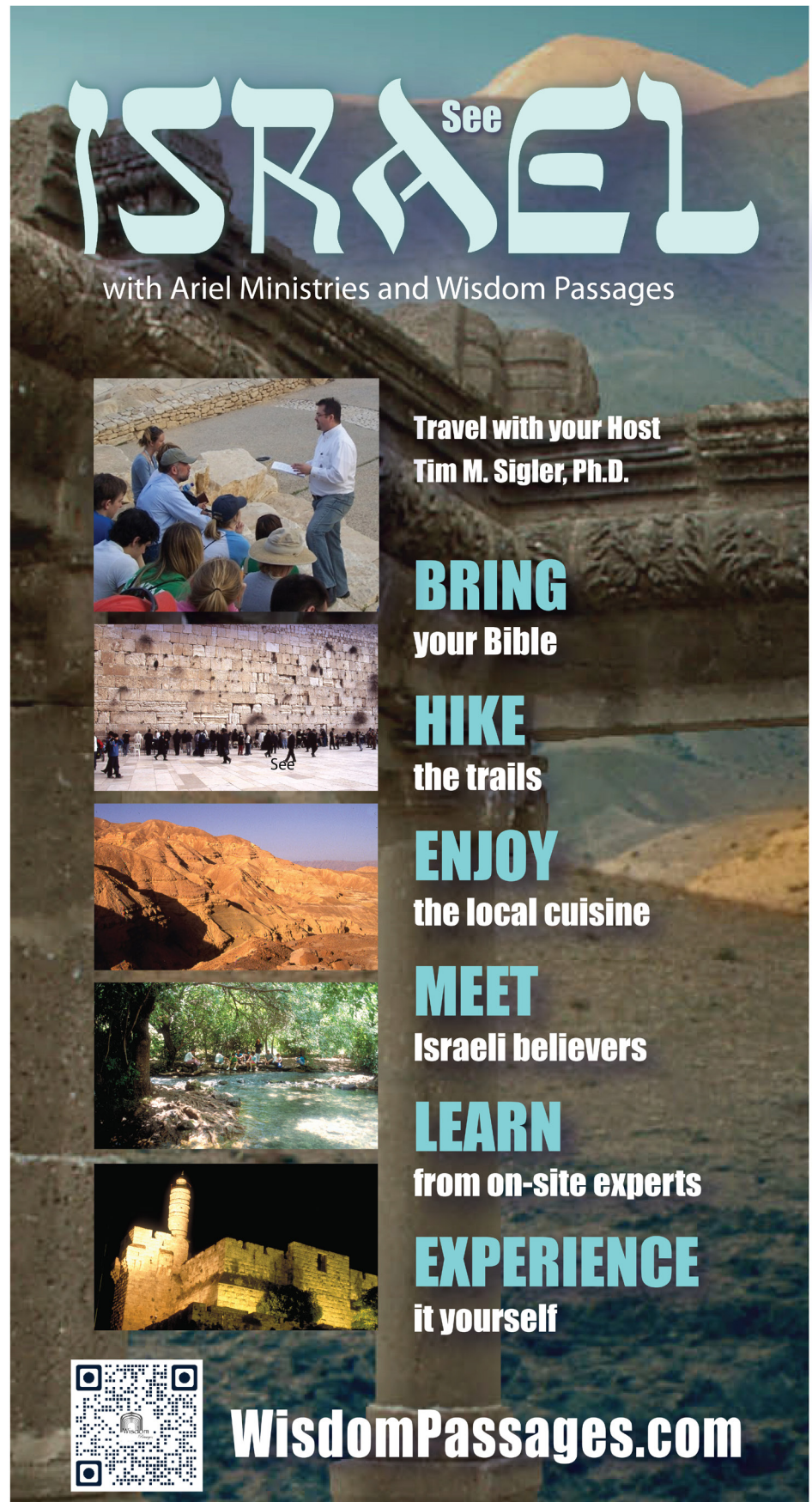


who the passage is actually addressed to: ethnically Jewish people, as stated in verse 17. Paul was warning them that being ethnically Jewish was not enough. They must also embrace saving faith through the Jewish Messiah in order to truly be *Yehudim*. This Hebrew word for “Jews” means “praisers of God.” In verses 17-29, Paul challenged his readers that simply being Jewish is not enough if they reject their Jewish Messiah.

Nowadays, many believers get their teachings from bigoted YouTube videos against the Jewish people. It is sad to see these people being gullible and embracing conspiracy theories against the Jewish community—something they are directly warned against throughout Romans 11. All of us who have come into the family of God have an equally beloved status. In 1 Corinthians 7:18-20, God specifically instructs Jewish believers to remain as Jews, i.e., identifiably Jewish. In that same passage, God instructs believers who are not from a Jewish family to find contentment in their current state, not imagining that they have become Jewish, which is a false teaching of replacement theology. May God find each of us using the available time to bring all the saving knowledge of Messiah Yeshua.



Mottel Baleston is the director of the Messengers Messianic Outreach based in New Jersey (www.MessiahNJ.org).



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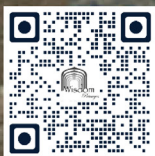
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Trusting in God's Word Amidst Chaos and Serving in Israel

By Agustin Wainberg

Agustin Wainberg serves as the worship leader at Congregation Beth Messiah in Houston, Texas. In this letter, he shares several practical ideas of how to serve one another in these dark times.



Shalom
dear Readers,

In these dark times, it is crucial to remember and trust in the Word of God. I want to share an experience that changed my life and strengthened my faith.

A Date to Remember: **October 7th, 2023**

Where were you on October 7th, 2023? I vividly remember where I was. The day before, I had boarded an airplane heading to Tel Aviv. I was about to land amid a horrifying catastrophe and massacre. On the ground, the chaos was overwhelming—children who lost their parents, parents searching for lost children, people running to bomb shelters, and jets constantly flying overhead. One of my family members had to be rescued by the IDF.

Amid the turmoil, I asked the Lord, “Why am I here? Why did You bring me here knowing what was going to happen?” Later, I began to understand God’s purpose. We could minister to survivors, visit army bases, and speak to soldiers about Yeshua. We partnered with the Saint Joseph Project to bring toys and gifts to children who had lost their parents. We worshiped with families that had survived the atrocities.

A Moment of **Vulnerability and Trust**

One night, I lay awake, unable to sleep due to the fear and chaos around me. I felt an overwhelming sense of fear. I was less than a mile away from the West Bank, and the sound of bombs and jets was constant. In my desper-

ation, a scripture came to my mind: Psalm 56:3, “When I am afraid, I will trust in You.”

At that moment, the Lord challenged me: “How many times have you read this scripture? How often have you taught it, sung it, or preached about it to your children? But do you trust me? Do you truly believe in it?” This struck me deeply. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing right through the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

The Word of God is alive and active and must be alive and active within us. It’s not enough to know the words; we must trust and believe in them. At that

moment, I repented and prayed, “Lord, I’m afraid, but I trust in You.” Suddenly, all the fear and desperation disappeared, and I was overwhelmed with God’s peace.

Finding Peace Amidst Darkness

Philippians 4:7 says, “And the shalom of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Messiah Yeshua.” Human understanding cannot comprehend how to feel peace amidst darkness, but God’s peace transcends all understanding. Even in our worst circumstances, His shalom can envelop us.

One of my favorite stories as a worship leader is from 2 Chronicles 20:21. Jehoshaphat puts the worship team before the Israeli army. They praise the Lord, declaring, “Give thanks to the Lord, for His love endures forever.” Their enemies are defeated with the strength of praise. We are in a spiritual war zone, and, just as in the times of Jehoshaphat, we must stand together, Jews and Gentiles, declaring the Word of the Lord and praising Him. Second Corinthians 1:10 reminds us, “He who rescued us from so great a danger of death will continue to rescue us; we have set our hope on Him, and He will rescue us again.” Throughout history, the Lord has rescued His people time and again. He is faithful to His Word, which is alive and active.

Returning to Israel with Reach Initiative International

After the chaos of October 7th, my wife Miranda and I felt a calling to return to Israel. We were honored to spend ten days doing mission work with Reach

Initiative International (RII). Understanding the significance of our commitment, we left our two boys in the loving care of their grandparents, ready to immerse ourselves in the efforts to provide love and support to those in need during this critical time. We focused on several key areas:

Holocaust Survivor Support

We visited Holocaust survivors, many of whom had been living in hotels since October 7th. I played piano as music therapy, and we listened to their incredible stories of resilience and survival.

Aid to Injured IDF Soldiers

We met with IDF soldiers recovering from severe injuries. Their stories of bravery and perseverance were profoundly moving. We brought gifts and prayed for each of them.

Refugee Ministry

We also spent time with refugees from the war in Ukraine, exploring historical and biblical sites and sharing stories of resilience and hope.

Community Initiatives

Through RII’s “Welcome Home” program, we helped deliver furniture and necessities to families in need. We worshiped with survivors of October 7th in Sderot, who have now moved back into their homes.

Reflecting on our time in Israel, the depth of our experiences and the connections we made were transformative. Witnessing the tangible impact of this ministry underscored the importance of being present and lending a hand. We

returned home with a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of love and support.

A Call to Trust and Open Our Hearts

Dear readers, I invite you to open your hearts to the Lord. No matter what circumstances you are facing, believe in His Word. Believe that it is alive and active within you. Let it transform your life, your surroundings, and the nation. Trust in Him, for He is faithful, and His peace surpasses all understanding.

“Lord, we open our hearts to you. Forgive us for not trusting your Word. We need you, and we love you.”



Agustin Wainberg is the worship leader at Congregation Beth Messiah in Houston. He was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and raised as a Messianic Jewish believer in Brazil. He studied classical music in South America before coming to the United States. He graduated from Christ For The Nations Institute with a degree in pastoral leadership and is currently pursuing his rabbinical degree at The King’s University. He and his family live in Houston, TX. To learn more about Reach Initiative International, visit reachii.org.



Two Kinds of Forgiveness with God

By Dr. Steven R. Cook



In our relationship with God, there are two kinds of forgiveness. One is judicial and the other is parental. Judicial forgiveness is the forgiveness we receive from God when we stand before Him as the Judge of all humanity. This forgiveness occurs at the moment of faith in Messiah, where “everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43; cf. Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). This is an event that is never repeated, as He has “forgiven us all our transgressions” (Col. 2:13).

Parental forgiveness is the ongoing forgiveness we receive from God as our Father and is repeated many times throughout a believer’s life. Judicial forgiveness brings us into a right relationship with Him at the moment of faith in Messiah. Parental forgiveness restores our fellowship with Him.

William MacDonald summarizes the two kinds of forgiveness in a very similar manner:

There are two kinds of forgiveness, judicial and parental. When we trust Christ as Lord and Savior, we receive forgiveness from

the penalty of sins; that is judicial forgiveness. When we, as believers, confess our sins, we receive parental forgiveness (1 John 1:9); this maintains fellowship with God our Father.¹

Judicial Forgiveness

Judicial forgiveness relates to our eternal salvation and right relationship with God. Paul wrote, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, **the forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7), and God has “**forgiven us all our transgressions**, having erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:13b-14).

God’s judicial forgiveness is not arbitrary, as though He simply releases someone from their sin-debt without any payment for the offenses that were committed. The payment for sin was not made by us, but Messiah. Peter states, “You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from

your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, **but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Messiah**” (1 Pet. 1:18-19). God’s judicial forgiveness was made possible by the blood of Yeshua, which refers to His sacrificial atoning death on the cross, where He “died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).

The blood of His Son is the only coin of the heavenly realm that the Father accepts as payment for our sin debt. This is the forgiveness we receive because Messiah shed His blood on the cross and paid the penalty for our sins

Harold Hoehner notes:

The shedding of blood is necessary (Lev 17:11; Eph 2:13; 1 Pet 1:19) for without it there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:22), and Paul makes it clear that God has been propitiated in Christ’s redemption, which was in connection with his blood (Rom 3:24-25), and that one is justified by means of Christ’s blood (Rom 5:9).²

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p. 863.



The benefit to us is that **“everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins”** (Acts 10:43). This means we are judicially forgiven of all our sins—past, present, and future—and will never face condemnation. Yeshua said, **“He who believes in Him is not judged”** (Jn. 3:18a), and “he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and **does not come into judgment**, but has passed out of death into life” (Jn. 5:24). Paul wrote, “There is now **no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua**” (Rom. 8:1). That’s good news, for we will never face the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

According to Norman Geisler, “forgiveness does not erase the sin; history cannot be changed. But forgiveness does erase the record of the sin. Like a pardon, the crime of the accused is not expunged from history but is deleted from his account.”³ Paul Enns adds:

Forgiveness is the legal act of God whereby He removes the charges that were held against the sinner because proper satisfaction or atonement for those sins has been made. There are several Greek words used to describe forgiveness. One is *charizomai*, which is related to the word grace and means “to forgive out of grace.” It is used of cancellation of a debt (Col. 2:13). The context emphasizes that our debts were nailed to the cross, with Christ’s atonement freely forgiving the sins that were charged

against us. The most common word for forgiveness is *aphiemi*, which means “to let go, release” or “send away.” The noun form is used in Ephesians 1:7 where it stresses the believer’s sins have been forgiven or sent away because of the riches of God’s grace as revealed in the death of Christ. Forgiveness forever solves the problem of sin in the believer’s life—all sins past, present, and future (Col 2:13). This is distinct from the daily cleansing from sin that is necessary to maintain fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness is manward; man had sinned and needed to have his sins dealt with and removed.⁴

Though Messiah died for everyone (Heb. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:2), the benefit of forgiveness is available only to those who trust in Him as Savior, for “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Judicial forgiveness of sins is available to all, but each person must exercise their own volition and turn to Messiah, and Him alone, for salvation.

The moment we place our faith in Messiah, we are judicially forgiven all our sins—past, present, and future—and receive the very righteousness of God as a free gift (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). At that moment, we are declared righteous in God’s sight for all eternity, being “justified as a gift by His

grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24), and “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

Parental Forgiveness

The second kind of forgiveness is the parental forgiveness we receive as God’s children who have committed sin and broken fellowship with our Father. As believers, we continue to live in a fallen world with all sorts of external temptations, and we continue to possess a sin nature that tempts us internally. The sin nature is what Paul referred to when he gave instruction to “make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:14) and to “lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit” (Eph. 4:22).

Paul, as a believer, described his own struggle with ongoing sin (Rom. 7:14-20), saying, “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good” (Rom. 7:21).

As long as we live in this world, we, as believers, constantly deal with internal struggles because we have two opposing natures. Paul wrote of this struggle, saying, “the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Gal. 5:17). When we yield to temptation, whether internal or external, we sin, which means we are operating according to

² Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 207.

³ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), p. 227.

⁴ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), pp. 325-326.



Satan's world system (1 Jn. 2:15-16). We have grieved the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and have broken fellowship with God, as we are walking in darkness and not practicing the truth (1 Jn. 1:6). At that moment, we are sinning saints, and we are not in fellowship with God. Being honest with God and ourselves is important, for "if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us...[and] if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8, 10). When we accept this truth, we can then be humble and honest with God and come before His throne of grace and find mercy (Heb. 4:16).

Thankfully, God has made a way whereby we can be restored to fellowship with Him, and that is by means of confession of our sins. John wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). Once we confess our sins directly to God, He forgives us, and we are restored to fellowship with Him and ready to resume our spiritual walk by faith and advance to maturity. Concerning 1 John 1:9, William MacDonald states:

The forgiveness John speaks about here is parental, not judicial. Judicial forgiveness means forgiveness from the penalty of sins, which the sinner receives when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is called judicial because it is granted by God acting as Judge. But what about sins which a person commits after conversion? As

far as the penalty is concerned, the price has already been paid by the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary. But as far as fellowship in the family of God is concerned, the sinning saint needs parental forgiveness, that is, the forgiveness of His Father. He obtains it by confessing his sin. We need judicial forgiveness only once; that takes care of the penalty of all our sins—past, present, and future. But we need parental forgiveness throughout our Christian life.⁵

If we don't confess our sins and continue to live in rebellion to God, we are subject to His discipline, for "the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as his son" (Heb. 12:6). However, this chastening is always in time and does not extend into eternity, for "when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). If we continue in sin or leave our sin unconfessed, we forfeit eternal rewards (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Jn. 1:8) and are in danger of divine discipline from God (Ps. 32:3-4; Heb. 12:5-11; 1 Jn. 5:16-17; cf. Dan. 4:37), which can eventuate in physical death (1 Jn. 5:16; cf. Acts 5:3-5). This is avoidable if we simply humble ourselves before the Lord, confess our sins, and resume our walk with Him and advance to spiritual maturity.

Conclusion

In summary, there are two kinds of forgiveness between us and God: ju-

dicial and parental. Judicial forgiveness occurs once and is related to our eternal salvation, bringing us into a right relationship with God through faith in Messiah (Acts 4:12; Gal. 3:26). This forgiveness is made possible by Messiah's sacrificial death on the cross, where His blood serves as the payment for our sin. It results in the removal of the record of sin, ensuring we will never face condemnation or the lake of fire. On the other hand, parental forgiveness is ongoing and pertains to our temporal fellowship with God. It is received through confession of sins to God, as stated in 1 John 1:9. While judicial forgiveness addresses the penalty of sins, parental forgiveness restores fellowship within the family of God. As believers, we are encouraged to confess our sins continually to maintain our familial relationship with God.

⁵ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, pp. 2310-2311.



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